

Direct and indirect speech

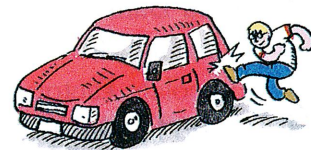
Direct speech quotes the actual words of the speaker:

"I'm sorry I kicked your car," the young lad said to Mrs Evans.

Indirect speech reports what was said (some people call it 'reported speech' for this reason):

- ✓ The young lad apologised to Mrs Evans for kicking her car.
- ✓ The young lad told Mrs Evans that he was sorry that he had kicked her car.

In this section, we practise writing in both forms so that you can use either form with confidence when appropriate in your own writing.



Direct speech

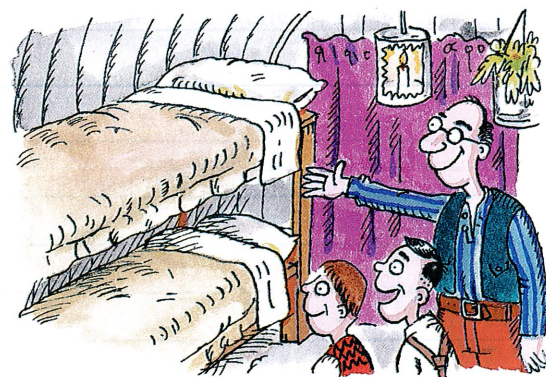
See how Michelle Magorian uses direct speech in this early extract from *Goodnight Mister Tom*:

"Cor!" gasped Willie. "Ain't it fine!"

"Best to be comfortable," said Tom, and he gave a short cough to hide his pleasure.

"Proper job," agreed George.

From *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian (Puffin 1983)



You can see the advantages of direct speech. Reading this, it's as if you were there, eavesdropping on the conversation in the newly dug air-raid shelter. You can 'hear' the voices of the speakers as well as their words.

Punctuating direct speech needs some care. There are four basic patterns (which you can use as models).

1

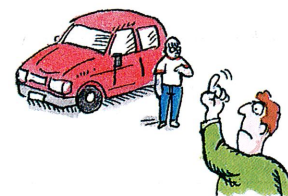
Speech first, narrative second

"I am sorry," he said. (statement)

"Why did you do it?" she asked. (question)

"Come here!" ordered Mr Evans. (command)

- Inverted commas enclose the words actually spoken and the punctuation that goes with it (a comma, a question mark or an exclamation mark).
- Note how the rest of the sentence (the narrative) continues with an initial small letter because the sentence **as a whole** is not yet finished.



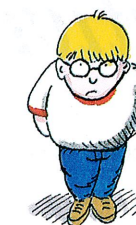
2

Narrative first, speech second

He said, "I'm sorry."

She asked, "Why did you do it?"

Mr Evans ordered, "Come here!"



- As before, inverted commas enclose the actual words spoken.
- A comma marks the transition from narrative to speech.
- Each sentence of speech begins with a capital letter.
- The full stop goes inside the inverted commas.
- No other full stop is needed.

3

A sentence of speech interrupted by narrative



"I'm sorry," he said, "that I kicked your car."

"Why," she asked, "did you do it?"

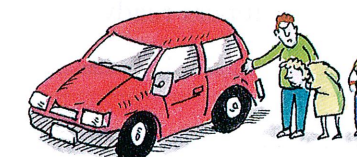
"Come here," ordered Mr Evans, "and let me have a look at you!"

- A comma marks the transition from speech to narrative.
- A comma marks the transition from narrative back to speech.
- An initial small letter is used when speech is resumed because it's **not** a new sentence being started.

4

Two or more sentences in one speech

"I'm sorry that I kicked your car," he said. "I don't know what made me do it. I've never kicked a car before."



- Inverted commas indicate where the words quoted begin and end. They do **not** have to enclose every single sentence spoken within that speech!

The layout of direct speech

Look at how dialogue is presented in the novels that you read. Look again at the extract from *Goodnight Mister Tom* opposite.

- A new line is taken every time there is a change of speaker (even if only one word is spoken).
- The beginning of each speech is indented slightly.

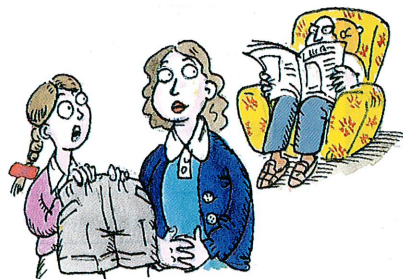
Indirect speech



See how Michelle Magorian makes effective use of indirect speech in another extract from *Goodnight Mister Tom*:

She'd been asking her mother for ages if she could wear shorts but had been told that she'd turn into a boy if she did and no man would want to marry her. Her father had said it was all right by him but he had already let her have her own way about the high school and didn't want to cause any more friction.

From *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian (Puffin 1983)



A lot of talking over a considerable period of time has been condensed into this one paragraph. Indirect speech enables you in this way to 'get on with the story' when little would be gained by quoting what was said.

When you convert direct speech to indirect speech, you have to adjust:

- verb tenses
- pronouns
- possessive adjectives
- some references to time and place.

Tenses of verbs

Direct speech: "I **am** sorry," he said, "that I **kicked** your car."

Indirect speech: He said that he **was** sorry that he **had kicked** her car.

Everything is taken one stage further back in time:

Direct speech tenses

he **kicks**
he **is kicking**
he **does kick**
he **kicked**
he **did kick**
he **has kicked**
he **has been kicking**
he **will kick**
he **will be kicking**
he **will have kicked**
he **will have been kicking**

Indirect speech tenses

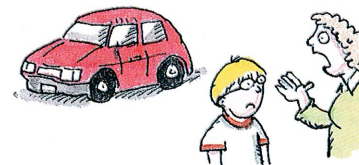
→ he **kicked**
→ he **was kicking**
→ he **did kick**
→ he **had kicked**
→ he **had kicked**
→ he **had kicked**
→ he **had been kicking**
→ he **would kick**
→ he **would be kicking**
→ he **would have kicked**
→ he **would have been kicking**



Pronouns

Direct speech: "Why did **you** do it?" she asked **him**.

Indirect speech: She asked **him** why **he** had done it.



Change all pronouns to the third person:

I, me; myself
you (sing.); yourself } → **he, him; she, her; himself, herself**

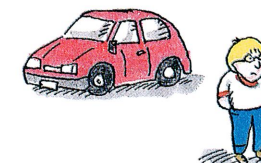
we, us; ourselves
you (pl.); yourselves } → **they, them; themselves**

Possessive adjectives

Direct speech: "I am sorry that I kicked **your** car," he said.

Indirect speech: He said that he was sorry he had kicked **her** car.

my, your (sing.) → **his/her**
our, your (pl.) → **their**



References to time and place

Direct speech: "I'll meet you **here tomorrow**," promised Shaun.

Indirect speech: Shaun promised that he would meet her **there the next day**.

now → **then**
at this moment → **at that moment**
today → **that day**
yesterday → **the previous day, the day before**
tomorrow → **the next day, the day after**
here → **there**
this place → **that place**

...and so on

**Note: The punctuation of indirect questions and indirect commands**

When questions and commands are changed from direct to indirect speech, they become statements **and need full stops**.

"How are you?" he asked. → He asked how she was.

"Stop talking!" she shouted. → She ordered the class to stop talking.